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Seventeenth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 345th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Monday, 14 July 1997, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. BUSTELO GARCÍA DEL REAL
(Vice-Chairperson)

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In the absence of Ms. Khan, Ms. Bustelo García del Real, Vice-Chairperson, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 18 OF THE CONVENTION (continued)

Initial report of Armenia (continued) (CEDAW/C/ARM/1 and Corr.1)

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, Mr. Abelian and Ms. Aghadjanian (Armenia) took places at the Committee table.

Article 6

2. Ms. BERNARD referring to paragraph 34 of the corrigendum to the report (CEDAW/C/ARM/1/Corr.1), inquired why prostitution was not considered a major problem and requested detailed statistics indicating the extent of prostitution in Armenia. She wished to know whether men who solicited prostitutes were punishable by law to the same degree as men who lived off prostitutes' earnings.

3. Mr. ABELIAN reminded the Committee that the information provided in paragraphs 34 to 99 of Armenia's initial report (CEDAW/C/ARM/1) was based on the Constitution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, which had been superseded by the Armenian Constitution, and should be replaced by the information in the corrigendum to the report (CEDAW/C/ARM/1/Corr.1).

4. Ms. CASTILLO said that the Committee had the right to consider all the information provided, and her question pertained to both the original report and the corrigendum. There were surely better ways of combating prostitution than by penalizing prostitutes and owners of brothels; the imposition of penalties and prison sentences would not solve the problem. She wished to know whether there were any health care programmes for women engaged in prostitution, particularly programmes that included measures to protect women from sexually transmitted diseases. She asked whether there were any programmes to protect prostitutes and their children and any opportunities for prostitutes to be reintegrated into the country's workforce. It would also be of interest to know whether there were any plans to amend the Armenian Constitution with respect to women engaged in prostitution and traffic in women and girls, and whether the Government of Armenia was making any effort to eliminate stereotypes. She requested statistics on prostitution and traffic in women.

5. She inquired whether different legal standards were applied to prostitutes and their clients, and whether prostitutes' clients also paid fines. She wished to know whether prostitutes were victims of police violence and persecution and, if so, what measures were being taken to stop such practices. According to paragraph 54 of the uncorrected report, there were few cases of prostitutes being murdered and investigations of such cases were carried out in the same way as investigations of other murder cases; she wondered what that implied. She

requested the representatives of Armenia to comment on the stigmatizing of women engaged in prostitution.

6. Ms. JAVATE DE DIOS said that, while Armenia had acknowledged that there had been an increase in prostitution, the report did not provide any detailed information on that subject. In view of the economic crisis in Armenia, it was difficult to believe that there was no trafficking in women. The Government of Armenia should conduct research on prostitution and trafficking. According to paragraph 35 of the corrigendum to the report, there had been no reported cases of rape of prostitutes. She could not believe that no violence had been perpetrated against prostitutes. Since prostitutes were criminalized, she asked how a prostitute who had been raped was able to take her case before the courts and obtain justice.

7. Ms. GONZALEZ said that the Government of Armenia should provide comparative statistics that illustrated the extent to which prostitution had increased, indicating its current level.

Article 7

8. Ms. BERNARD wished to know what had accounted for the dramatic decrease in the number of women members of Parliament. She wished to know what measures were being taken to promote women's upward mobility and to encourage society to abandon the traditional belief that a woman's place was in the home. According to the report, women held mid-level positions in culture, science, education and health, and she wished to know whether any measures were being taken to promote their upward mobility.

Article 8

9. Ms. JAVATE DE DIOS requested information on the way in which Government and Foreign Service officials were recruited. In that regard, she inquired whether the same criteria were applied to both men and women, and whether diplomats or potential diplomats received training in human rights instruments, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. She wished to know what was the role of the Foreign Service in preparing human rights reports, and whether there were any plans to mainstream women's issues in the human rights reporting process.

Article 9

10. Ms. GONZALEZ said that the information on citizenship provided in paragraph 43 of the corrigendum was somewhat confusing. The representatives of Armenia should explain under what circumstances a child remained without citizenship. Was it because the child's parents could not reach agreement or because the child had been born outside Armenia? Failure to provide a child with citizenship was a breach of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Article 10

11. Ms. BARE said that, in spite of their high level of education, Armenian women did not enjoy the same professional opportunities as their male counterparts, and she requested the representatives of Armenia to explain why that was the case. She wished to know whether women received any career guidance directing them to careers that provided better opportunities for upward mobility and, if that was not the case, what prevented women from obtaining executive positions.

12. Ms. FERRER asked what percentage of school-age girls were attending school on a regular basis. She inquired whether the statistics provided in the report had been taken from the total number of school-age children or the total number of students enrolled in education at those levels. She wished to know whether there had been a decrease in the number of young and teenage girls who currently participated in all levels of education. Paragraph 48 of the corrigendum stated that assistance to children from low-income and poor families was based on appeals by parents and by special decisions of the School Executive Committee, and she would welcome an explanation of how that system worked, especially in the light of the widespread poverty in Armenia. In particular, she asked whether Armenia's current economic difficulties had affected girls' access to assistance. According to the table at the bottom of page 12 of the corrigendum, the number of women graduates in the technical, agricultural and health fields had decreased dramatically between 1985 and 1994, and she requested an explanation for that decline. She wished to know what was taught at the special educational centres for women and why men did not have access to them.

13. Ms. HARTONO said that it would be of interest to learn whether female graduates in the field of health were primarily nurses, or whether that category also included doctors and other medical specialists. She requested statistics on the number of women professors at Armenian higher educational institutions. The statistics on female graduates did not include the fields of law or social sciences, and she asked why Armenian women seemed to have no interest in their national legal system. She noted that one out of nine judges in the Constitutional Court was a woman, and she asked whether that woman judge had practised law prior to her appointment or had been chosen on the basis of her political career. Information should be provided on the structure and mandate of the Constitutional Court and its relation to the two-tiered court mentioned in the report. Lastly, she wished to know whether the obstacles faced by women in obtaining positions as decision-makers were due to traditional or religious beliefs.

14. Ms. Yung Chung KIM said it was unclear whether female students had any prospects of pursuing specialized careers after completing their studies. There was a striking imbalance between the number of men and women teachers at the primary and secondary school levels, and she asked how Armenian society viewed that imbalance. Information should be provided on the number of women professors at Armenian universities.

15. Ms. BERNARD sought information about the incidence of HIV/AIDS among prostitutes and whether any facilities had been established to provide treatment for them.

Article 11

16. Ms. ACAR requested information about women in the informal sector, since informal commerce no doubt provided women with much-needed income and helped them support their families. While such activity enhanced the status of women, it also put women in a very vulnerable position, since informal commerce overlapped with prostitution and trafficking and resulted in new and different forms of female exploitation. In that connection, she wished to know whether the Government of Armenia had taken any measures to protect women employed in the informal sector, and what kind of social and family benefits were available to such women.

17. Ms. BARE said that she would appreciate information on any measures that the Government of Armenia had taken to offer alternative employment opportunities to unemployed women, and she inquired whether credit and information were provided in order to enable women to be gainfully employed and enhance their social status. She wondered why women's salaries were 25 per cent lower than those of men for comparable work, particularly as Armenia had signed a number of International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions, and she asked whether women were able to participate in trade-union activities with a view to improving their situation.

18. Ms. JAVATE DE DIOS said that, although Armenian women were highly educated and constituted a valuable human resource, they had not been absorbed into the labour market, and she wondered whether the Government of Armenia was planning to take any measures to address that situation. She wished to know why women were being pushed out of the labour market, and whether there were any plans to assist women with children, particularly women who were heads of households. She asked to what extent the Government was still able to implement its social security system, especially with regard to maternity leave, and, if it was unable to do so, what other safety nets were available to women. It would be of interest to know whether child care facilities in the workplace were legally required and, if so, to what extent that policy was being put into practice.

19. Noting that 50 per cent of young girls went abroad for their education, she asked what type of education they received abroad and why it was important for them to go abroad to study, since they had so few job prospects in Armenia. It seemed that Armenian society attached little importance to the role of men in bringing up children, and she encouraged the Government of Armenia to place more emphasis on the parental responsibility of men.

20. Ms. FERRER noted that paragraph 54 of the corrigendum to the report stated that employers could not refuse to hire or to fire women on the grounds of pregnancy or maternity (art. 197 of the Labour Code), whereas paragraph 18 of the same document stated that the employment of pregnant and nursing women in positions requiring hard manual labour and on night shifts was prohibited (arts. 184-187 of the Labour Code). She would welcome an explanation of that apparent contradiction in the provisions of the Labour Code.

21. With reference to the table on employment by spheres on page 13 of the corrigendum, it would be useful to know what percentage of the country's total labour force was represented by the figures provided. It would also be

interesting to learn who determined the types of jobs which women were forbidden to do and whether that determination was made in accordance with established legislative provisions or left up to the judgement of the employer. If such legislation was in force, she wondered whether women were free to engage in the occupations in question after their reproductive periods or if they decided not to have any more children.

22. Ms. Yung Chung KIM inquired whether the 70 days of paid maternity leave guaranteed by the Labour Code was in fact implemented and by whom. She wondered whether any thought had been given to the introduction of parental leave entitlements and whether the notion of both parents sharing responsibility for child rearing was gaining greater acceptance in Armenia. She understood that the Government had retained the social safety net inherited from the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and wondered how it was coping with the financial burden which that entailed, particularly in view of Armenia's current economic difficulties.

Article 12

23. Ms. SHALEV sought more information on the proposed reform of the health care system in Armenia and asked whether privatization was one aspect of the envisaged reform. Privatization would raise certain concerns for the Committee, since it usually led to a reduction in the level of health care services available to the needy. The reported 13.5 per cent of the national budget devoted to the health sector was very high, especially in view of the country's economic difficulties, and she wondered what that figure represented in terms of actual health services provided. Referring to paragraph 73 of the corrigendum, she commended the Ministry of Health for identifying four problem areas and said that it would be of interest to learn the level of resources allocated to those areas.

24. Abortion appeared to be used as a method of fertility control, which was unfortunate since it could result in infertility. A more effective method of fertility control would be to ensure that contraceptives were made available under family planning programmes or that their cost was reimbursable under health insurance schemes.

25. The report lacked adequate statistics on the health status of women. The Committee would welcome, in particular, gender-disaggregated data on HIV/AIDS and on the incidence of teenage pregnancies. It would also welcome more information on the access of rural women to health services and on the health services that were available to refugee women.

26. Ms. ABAKA sought more information on the types of contraceptives that were readily available to women in Armenia. In her view, there was a contradiction between the current restrictive abortion laws and the lack of access to adequate family planning services, including prenatal care. While the Government clearly had the political will to implement the provisions of article 12 of the Convention, it faced the reality of a severe economic crisis. Unfortunately, solutions to urgent health problems could not be postponed and ways must be found to improve the health conditions under which Armenian women lived.

27. She would appreciate additional information on the prevalence of work-related illnesses among women and on the incidence of drug addiction and alcoholism. The latter problem, in particular, might be exacerbated by the difficult economic times which Armenia was currently experiencing. In that connection, she wondered what effect the problems of the country as a whole were having on the mental health of Armenian women.

28. Lastly, she wished to reiterate the concern expressed by another expert at the proposed privatization of health services. Even in highly developed countries, privatization had resulted in reduced coverage for the most vulnerable sectors of society, including women.

Article 14

29. Ms. GONZALEZ noted that the report dealt with the question of rural women in Armenia in the general context of society's problems. The problems faced by rural women, however, particularly in the areas of employment, training and health services, were very serious and should have been addressed more specifically. She would welcome more information on the right of women to own land and to pass ownership on to their children. She also wished to know whether land owned by women had been included in the privatization programme referred to in paragraph 87 of the corrigendum to the report.

30. Ms. OUEDRAOGO asked whether rural women had played any role in drafting the legislation on improving the health of women in rural areas which was to be presented to the National Parliament.

Article 16

31. Ms. AOUIJ said that, despite the current economic and political difficulties which Armenia faced, the evident political will to address the country's problems and the high educational levels of the population were major assets in the struggle for development and equal treatment for women. The objective of development could be achieved, however, only if women were fully fledged participants in the process. It was an issue not simply of democracy but of social justice as well.

32. Noting that the forthcoming judicial reform would cover all legal codes except the Marriage Code and the Family Code, which were the subject of a parliamentary resolution, she asked what was the legal force of that resolution and whether the legislation in force viewed maternity as a social function for which men and women shared joint responsibility. She also wondered what roles had been played by women and non-governmental organizations in the review of existing laws. It was in the elaboration of laws that women had a valuable opportunity to voice their concerns and to have them included in the draft texts.

33. She would welcome information on what constituted grounds for divorce, the number of applications by women for divorce and the total number of divorces granted. She wondered whether women faced any practical obstacles when seeking a divorce through the courts and whether legal assistance was available to them. She also inquired whether legal services were available to refugee and displaced

women in Armenia and whether Armenian law or the national law of the refugee's State of origin applied in matrimonial affairs.

34. Lastly, she asked whether the Constitution provided for the establishment of political parties that were open only to persons of the same gender, since such a provision might have a negative impact on the number of women represented in other parties and might not be an appropriate solution to the problem of the under-representation of women at the highest decision-making levels.

The meeting rose at 4.30 p.m.